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The Educational Task of Dordt College, 1961

Dordt College

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A. Theological Background

Fundamental to the understanding of the educational task of Dordt College is the commitment of its constituency to the Word of God. That Word of God is divinely inspired, the infallible and only rule for faith and practice. In the face of varying interpretations of God's Word, membership in the Christian Reformed Church, including all faculty personnel at Dordt College, is bound by the interpretation of God's Word as stated in the three Formulas of Unity - - the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt.

These Formulae of Unity are in agreement with and flow out of the Calvinistic interpretation of the Scriptures. Calvinism, which finds its source materials primarily in John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, is a broad system of theology, often called a world-and-life view, which rigorously applies the principles of God's Word to all areas of life. The Sovereignty of God is the basic principle in this system. Members of the Christian Reformed Church are strict adherents to this position. The basic propositions which are fundamental to the educational system of Dordt College, if not precise formulations of the Calvinistic pattern, are either direct implications, commonly accepted, from the Calvinistic position, or modifications which are oriented to the Calvinistic system.

B. The following propositions or principles shed light upon and undergird the entire educational program of Dordt College.

1. The origination and interpretation of all things is found ultimately in a personal, absolute, sovereign God. All things having been created by God, He alone gives meaning to all things.
2. Man, created in God's image, possesses the faculties necessary for the explication of meaning which is implicit in the universe, and for the understanding of the relationships between the various spheres of life and their ultimate relationship to the sovereign creator.
3. Man, created in God's image, is God's vice-gerent representative king, in the universe and is given the mandate, often called the cultural mandate, to subdue the earth bringing all things to serve God's glory. This calls man to the task of searching out all things and relationships, leading to the proper development of God's creation to its appointed goal.
4. Man, in his responsible position, must be properly developed so that the cultural mandate will not only be carried out, but that man himself may realize his potential as king and as God's masterpiece.
5. Sin has dealt a ruinous blow to God's image in man, not only crippling him in his task as God's representative king to fulfil the cultural mandate, but also setting him at variance with God's law and purpose. Fallen man lives and dies unto himself, exalting himself as the master of his own fate. By reason of man's representa-

tive capacity, the entire cosmos was affected by man's sin. The curse of sin has therefore impeded the perfect development of the natural order.

6. To counteract the influence of sin and to carry out His original program, God has engaged in the plan of redemption and recreation, centrally effected in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. In Christ fallen man is effectually called back into a living relationship with God, is restored through the regenerative work of Christ's Spirit to his position as God's representative king, and is committed to the task of reclaiming all of life for God's service and glory in accordance with His law.
7. The redemptive work of Christ has cosmic significance. He not only restores fallen man to his kingly position and activity; Christ also, as the new representative head and king of creation, by His atonement provides the basis for the restoration of the cosmos. By the restoration of man through the regenerative work of His Spirit, He enables man to understand and interpret His special revelation, the Holy Scriptures. Through the medium of the Scriptures man can interpret himself and all of nature (cosmos) in the context of sin and Christ's redemptive work. Man can cooperate with Christ's Spirit in the transformation of nature, leading all of creation to its consummation, ultimately achieved in the renewal of all things when Christ returns.

Unregenerate man cannot discern the pattern of larger spiritual and transcendent meanings. But he too under the blessing of Christ's re-creation can find moments of truth in the various realms of human endeavor. He may, for example, accomplish great things in the sciences or in the arts. But it is the Christian alone who finds for these truths their ultimate meaning and reference. This is his broadest educational task.

8. In the recreative work of God, His special revelation is the only rule for faith and life. That revelation is basically the key to the understanding of all meaning. It contains principles which govern all of life's relationships, And through it alone Christ's redemptive benefits can be enjoyed personally and in their cosmic reaches.
9. In the training and development of the redeemed in Christ the Holy Scriptures are basic, since they are indispensable to the proper realization of the individual's capacities and the proper fulfilling of his responsibilities. All education must be Scripturally oriented.
10. The redeemed look upon the whole universe as the object of their responsibility. No area or sphere is excluded. The cosmos is Christ's kingdom. In each sphere the principles of His Word must be applied. To guarantee this application of God's Word to all areas of life, as well as to bring about the reclamation of fallen man, Christ has instituted His Church. It is the solemn responsibility of

the Church to propagate and maintain the truth as revealed in Scripture; to see to it that her membership is instructed in the knowledge of Scripture; to demand an education for her children and youth which is Scripturally oriented; and to inform her members of the principles of God's Word as they apply to their various labors and activities in God's kingdom.

11. While the instituted Church informs her membership concerning their responsibilities in God's kingdom, it is not her task to engage in specifically kingdom activities. The instituted church normally does not control and operate institutions of mercy, educational institutions, etc. Her membership as citizens of the kingdom organize into societies, where necessary, to implement the kingdom programs.
12. God's kingdom is divided into specific spheres. There are spheres of education, state, church, home, mercy, labor, etc. Each sphere has its distinct task. What belongs to one sphere should not, normally, be transferred to another sphere. Each sphere wherever necessary should have its own society for the implementation of its task. The church, though in a sense a part of the kingdom, holds a unique position in the kingdom in that it speaks to all spheres, delineating the principles of God's Word as they apply to them.
13. Although God's kingdom is divided into several spheres, one must guard against viewing the spheres as static, in a compartmentalistic sense. The various spheres are organically related. They are governed by the same laws of interpretation and meaning. And they flow into one another in a dynamic and vital context. While each sphere has its distinct task, there is bound to be a measure of overlapping and shifting of peripheral responsibilities from sphere to sphere, resulting from changes in our dynamic, rapid moving social order. That which is self-evidently the distinct task of each sphere should be zealously honored and respected as the solemn right of that sphere.
14. Education as a distinct sphere in God's kingdom has a specific task to perform. Its task is that of contributing to the development of Christian culture through the nurture of the rational-moral character of man. This is achieved by the refinement of his mind, his manners, his morals and his tastes, through the use of the various disciplines and skills of learning, and the transmission of the scholarly knowledge of past generations to the present, together with the necessary evaluation and application, enabling the individual to realize himself as God's image bearer and to fulfil his purpose in human society commensurate with his capabilities and opportunities.
15. The subject material for education is the entire universe, nature and man. This is often called God's general revelation in distinction from His special revelation, the Bible, made necessary by sin. The latter is basic to the understanding of

meaning in the former. The educand must be developed and equipped through the various skills to that he may be led into the many areas of general revelation, often referred to as the fields of learning. Employing the tools of scholarship he gains an understanding and appreciation for all spheres as they reflect God's glory. He is inspired to make effective use of this knowledge as qualifications, opportunities, and resources permit.

16. Since all children born of the members of the church are brought into a living covenantal relationship to Christ by birth, which is signified in their baptism, and are both members of the church and citizens in God's kingdom, their entire education, from the dindergarten through higher education should aim toward their development and training for proper kingdom service through teaching that is thoroughly Scripturally oriented.
17. Education is specifically a kingdom sphere properly sponsored by a society of the covenant community. Yet it stands more closely to the instituted church in its relationship to the other spheres of the kingdom in that it too is fundamental as all spheres. It is preparatory to virtually all kingdom activity. Even the instituted church depends upon the sphere of education for the execution of her task. This explains the instituted church's serious concern relative to the education of her youth. Without education her task cannot be performed. Without a Scripturally oriented education for her youth, the effective realization of her responsibilities is critically endangered.

Consequently the alliance between the instituted church and education must be very close. Where necessary the instituted church stands ready to give official support through her resources and even to assume official control of education.